Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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on our knees and begging, we took the decision to organize ourselves in rebellion, to demand what is lacking, our right... We do not come to kneel nor to implore that they pity us. We do not want little stores, beetles, or tv, we want them to recognize our rights as indigenous persons and as women."
Comandante Esther
Mexico City, March 11

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"We Are Here!"

By Scott Handleman

MEXICO CITY — Beneath a glaring sun, the Sunday crowd in the Zocalo was in a festive mood as it awaited the arrival of the caravan, with music, puppets, banners, and vendors selling tamales, quesadillas, corn, tacos, snowcones, popsicles, cotton candy, toys, parasols, sodas, useless cardboard periscopes for viewing the stage, binoculars, and abundant EZLN paraphernalia: lighters, banners, kerchiefs, ski masks, pins, calendars, hundreds if not thousands of t-shirts.

They were young and old, indigenous, foreign and mestizo. Ezequiel Fernandez Carrasco, a Tlapanecan youth, walked to Mexico City from Guerrero with a band of Nahualtecans, Mixtecans and Tlapanecans to be at the rally. They left Chilpanzingo on February 24, and arrived in the Zocalo on March 3, where they slept. Among their demands: electricity, roads, water, work; a health center with medicines and someone knowledgeable to dispense them; a worthwhile price for coffee (this year it sold for as little as 1.5 pesos a kilo); information about their comrade Gregorio Alfonso Alvarado Lopez, disappeared since 1996; "that they recognize us as indigenous".

Stop after stop, the caravan had been generously welcomed. In the small town of Milpa Alta, for example, the community freely served food for 20,000 visitors: "200 kilos of meat, 180 of rice, 120 of beans, 220 of nopales, 500 of tortillas, 9,000 pieces of cocol, 1,000 liters of coffee," prepared over 36 hours, according to La Jornada.

The EZLN has stipulated three conditions that the government must meet before it will resume peace negotations, which broke off in 1996: the closure of seven military bases out of the 259 in Chiapas; the release of Zapatista political prisoners; approval by the legislature of the San Andres Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture, as modified by the Commission for Concord and Pacification (COCOPA). When Vicente Fox took office last December, he forwarded the COCOPA proposal to Congress for ratification.

The proposal would insert into Mexico's constitution a recognition that Mexico's indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. Further constitutional modifications would grant them autonomy: to decide their own forms of social, economic, political, and cultural organization; to solve internal problems according to their own norms, while always respecting the rights of women; to elect their own authorities; to agree on the collective use and enjoyment of the natural resources in their territories; to preserve and enrich their languages, knowledge, culture and identity; acquire and operate their own news media.

Development programs would take into account the needs and culture of indigenous populations, the state would guarantee them fair access to the distribution of national wealth, and the elected indigenous authorities would have the right to administer public funds assigned to their communities.

Speaking to a crowd of several thousand in San Pablo Oztotepec on Friday afternoon, Marcos articulated the justice of the indigenous demand for autonomy: "For them, [indigenous] history is myth, our doctrines are legends, our science is magic, our beliefs are superstitions, our art is craft, our games, dances and dress are folklore, our government is anarchy, our language is dialect, our love is sin and degradation… For them, to give us a place is to show us the tomb, the jail, oblivion…. They 'civilized us' yesterday and today they want to 'modernize' us. They tell us that their world is better. That we should leave our land, our home, our history. That we should come to their land and live underneath it. That we should live in their house and serve in it. That we should

(**Zapatistas** continued on page 6)

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Our Little Secrets

Abrams and Allen: The Truth At Last

Popping into CounterPunch's intray came a bracing story about our old friend Terry Allen who used to do layout for this newsletter and who's currently working for Democracy Now, Amy Goodman's Pacifica show. On hearing the story we queried Allen thus: "We hear that you bumped into that asshole Elliott Abrams in a Blockbuster Video store, ran up to him and told him he was a war criminal. Abrams snapped back, If you keep calling me a war criminal I'm going to call the police. To which you responded, I'd be delighted if you'd call the police. Then he skulked away. Any truth to this?"

Back came a speedy answer from Terry: "Almost. It was a computer store and I was with Sanho Tree. Rather than running up to Abrams, I spent about five minutes trying to think of something to say that didn't sound self-righteous, gave up and went up to him and asked if he was Elliott Abrams. He puffed up, flashed a smile and said 'Yes I am.' I said 'Then I want you to know that people around the world remember that you are a war criminal complicit in the death and misery of hundreds of thousands of people.'

"Abrams turned red, then purple, and turned to Sanho and said 'Are you in charge of this woman? Tell her to leave me alone.' Sanho was, as the Brits say, 'gobstruck' at that particular instruction.

"Abrams then threatened to call the police and called me a 'rotten bitch'. I replied 'coming from you, I consider that a compliment' and swept out of the store on a wave of, what else, self righteousness."

Good for Terry. CounterPunchers may recall that our designer Deborah Thomas and contributor JoAnn Wypijewski were evicted from a speech of Henry Kissinger at NYU after shouting about his blood-stained record and calling him a war criminal. These days we hear that Kissinger scoots through the lobby of the Century Club nervously, as if he fears that even in this sedate setting, he'll be reviled as the monster he is.

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Hold That Nostalgia!

So is it business as usual? No real change in Washington? At first glance, earlier this month, it suddenly seemed to be different. The Republicans were on the rampage. We saw the axing of work safety regs about repetitive motion; the overturning of bankruptcy laws long hated by banks and credit card companies; advances for Bush's tax cuts in the House.

The front page of the Washington Post Sunday, March 11, featured just the sort of story to make Gore-ites smirk "We told you so!" at the Nader folk. "Early Wins Embolden Lobbyists for Business" ran the headline over a story by Dan Morgan and Kathleen Day. The lobbyists, it seems, now look ahead "to passing a broader agenda that would pare back environmental and land use regulations, limit corporate liability for faulty products, rewrite rules protecting the privacy of patients' medical records, cut red tape blocking new oil refineries and pipelines and open the Arctic Wildlife National Refuge in Alaska to oil drilling."

This doesn't seem to us to be much of change from headlines two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve or twenty years ago saying the same thing. Corporate lobbyists are always looking forward to the day when the federal government will close down all aspects of its operations save those dishing out business subsidies, barring strikes and transferring issuance of regulations to the National Association of Manufacturers.

But Morgan and Day had a point. As of mid-March the business crowd felt good.

But hold! Same Sunday, as we plowed through the New York Times we tripped over this bank of headlines: "Moves on Environment Disappoint Industry // Bush's Early Acts Anger Oil and Mining." The miners and drillers are mad at Bush for his pledge not to overturn all the national monuments Clinton created in his last weeks in office, also at his namby-pamby upholding of Clintonian restraints on diesel and greenhouse gas emissions.

It looks like someone in the Bush White House remembers what happened to the Gingrich crowd in 1996 when they got painted into the anti-enviro corner. And remember, George W. spent bits of his childhood walking on the beach at Kennebunkport. He remembers those horseshoe crabs and one of his very first acts in the White House was to decree protections for these prehistoric creatures.

Of course, the White House is doubtless telling these coal and oil companies not to get too upset, that regulatory relief is on the way. So, we get the horseshoe crab and they get Alaska.

But hold again! Here, that same Sunday March 11, was the eminence grise of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, John Kenneth Galbraith, marching onto the New York Times op ed page to warn Republicans that, just like George W., Herbert Hoover tried tax cuts for the rich and the Fed's power to adjust interest rates, thus dooming the Republican Party to twenty years in the wilderness. It can happen again, Galbraith warns, if George W. tries to fight recession with Greenspan and a tax break only for the rich. "The administration faces political difficulty, even disaster."

But why would Galbraith care? He's a Democrat. Surely he wants Bush to plummet into catastrophe. Galbraith has an answer to this. He concludes that the national emergency may be so grave that he is suspending partisan sentiment. Very gallant. But maybe he feels privately that the Democrats are no longer capable of offering a Rooseveltian alternative. And indeed, back on the Washington Post op ed, that same Sunday, was a Galbraithian in the

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Elliott Abrams snapped back: "If you keep calling me a war criminal, I'm going to call the police."

form of Robert Reich, Clinton's erstwhile Labor Secretary, stating roundly that the Democratic Party is dead as that parrot in the famous Monty Python sketch.

"If the Democratic Party's alive," Reich wrote, "why doesn't it insist that the budget surplus be spent on health care for the 44 million Americans without it. And child care for the millions who lack it? And good schools for all kids? Why doesn't the party say it's plain absurd to spend $300 billion on the military when the Cold War is over, and tens of billions more on a missile defense shield that won't work. Why isn't it outraged that most of the benefits of President Bush's tax cut will go to people at the top? Why does it play dead on the environment? Why? Because it's not playing dead. It is dead."

Here's a man who sat in Clinton's cabinet for four years, sounding a bit to the left of Ralph Nader. Still in the midst of Sunday, March 11, we head back to the New York Times business section and settle down with an article headed "Nafta's Powerful Little Secret: Obscure Tribunals Settle Disputes, but Go Too Far, Critics Say." Turns out sovereignty means nothing. America's environmental laws can be overturned by corporations claiming protection for their rampages under the terms of NAFTA. The laws of Mexico and Canada are equally vulnerable. We on the left said that was going to happen , didn't we, back in the years of the NAFTA fight, when first Bush and then Clinton pushed the Agreement through.

Moral: when you read headlines about Republican lobbyists being "emboldened", think twice before you start getting nostalgic about the Clinton years. It's a bipartisan problem, just like we always said it was.

ALL THAT JAZZ

Sunil Sharma of Santa Rosa, California, writes:"Just got the latest CounterPunch in the mail. Your essay on the Ken Burns series Jazz is truly a gem of a read. I'm going to pass it on to all my musician friends (and foes). While I've only seen bits of Jazz, any purported documentary on the subject that gives ample space to the verbal diarrhea of the likes of W. Marsalis, Murray and Crouch must be the most dreadful cacophonic torture any lover of music can endure.

"I'm a professional jazz musician with a BA in Music. The most awful musical experience I had in college was to fork over what little dough I had one night and sit through a Joshua Redman concert. The over-marketed Redman, who's (tellingly) now yesterday's paper, was highly touted by Marsalis et al. as a 'young lion' keeping the 'tradition' alive in the face of Jazz's steady decline since Miles 'sold out' and went Rock. I fell asleep a few unmemorable tunes into the show. The compositions, to put it charitably, sucked. The tunes weren't even junior high level material. Redman's blowing was all mindless pyrotechnics and no substance. Study your Sonny Rollins kid; his incredible ability to take a simple motif and develop a compositional masterpiece over the course of a long solo (or to be silent when he has nothing to say, or when space is the best thing for the moment) is what we all need to woodshed!

"The wonderful sounds today coming from innovative musicians like Sonny Rollins, John Scofield, Bill Frisell, John Zorn, Geri Allen, Don Byron, Uri Caine, Ornette Coleman, Sex Mob, Cassandra Wilson, Tin Hat Trio and many others demonstrate what jazz truly is: an art form that reflects the lives of artists in their own time; constantly searching for new expressions; whose real 'tradition' is to be free of the straight-jacket of imposed parameters mislabeled 'the tradition' by self-aggrandizing charlatans who lack artistic imagination themselves. Wynton may be a great trumpeter, but has he penned a strong composition anybody can remember?

"If you haven't read it, check out Eric Nisenson's excellent Blue: the Murder of Jazz (St. Martins, 1997). Of revivalist Wynton Marsalis ('neoclassicist' isn't the right term for him, Crouch and Albert Murray), Nisenson writes: 'Given unprecedented public relations marketing, the record companies created the illusion that a talented young player was actually one of the all-time jazz greats. Much of his immediate fame was due to the fact that he had a separate career as a classical trumpet player. To the cultural elite, this meant that Marsalis was a "real" musician who could play "real" music and of course also that jazz stuff.

"'Marsalis was immediately acceptable in the higher strata of America's culture construct. And his attitude toward jazz was not dissimilar to his attitude toward playing Bach or Handel: He studied the "tradition", learned all about it, and played within the sanctity of the music's past without challenging listeners through musical exploration and innovation. No one had to worry about Marsalis jarring his audience with the shock of the new as, say, Mingus had with The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady or George Russell had with Living Time or Coltrane had with Meditations or Miles with Bitches Brew…

"'[This is why Marsalis was] made the principal producer, the auteur if you will, of Jazz at Lincoln Center. Since Lincoln Center is primarily a museum for music rather than a center for the creation of a living art, Marsalis's revivalism and backward-looking musical philosophy fit right into its cultural design. . . . But the idea of making jazz "safe" and "proper" for the sake of a supposedly "cultured" audience (read: middle-and-upper-class white people) is still obviously a successful one. The only difference now is that middle-and upper-class black people are now part of this supposedly cultured audience. Treating jazz like classical music is not a new idea, but it has never been as widely accepted as it is now.'

"Long Live CounterPunch"
Sunil Sharma,
Santa Rosa, California.

But we do have a correction to a quote in that Jazz article from Mapleshade Records director Pierre Sprey, who referred to Marsalis getting "his ass kicked every night in Art Blakey's band". That's what Pierre said, but for some reason it came out as Art Tatum's band. Sorry, Pierre. CP

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Straight Out of Ripley's Believe It Or Not

The Incredible F-22 Saga

Tiffany's on wings. That's how one senate aide refers to the Pentagon and its contractor's latest dream weapon: the F-22. "It's showy, unimaginably expensive, fragile and utterly useless", the aide tells us. "But there's no stopping it."

The F-22, known to its press agents as the "Raptor", has been on the drawing board since 1981, at which time the Air Force announced that it wanted a generation of new tactical fighter planes to replace the F-15. In 1986, Lockheed was picked to lead the development of this plane, then known as the Advanced Tactical Fighter.

Across the next 15 years, billions of dollars have been poured into the project with little to show for it. Indeed, the F-22 has enjoyed the longest coming out party of any plane in the history of the Pentagon. And, according to Pentagon analysts, it's still nowhere near ready to go into production. Indeed, some argue that the plane, designed to attack an enemy that no longer exists, is already obsolete, both technologically and strategically.

But don't expect these trifling details to stand in the way of the Pentagon, Air Force brass, Lockheed and the F-22's two other prime contractors, Pratt/Whitney and Boeing. These parties are now rushing to put the troubled plane into what's called "initial low rate production" at a date as close as March 30 of this year. Unless the Bush administration intervenes, the Air Force will be saddled with at least 10 of these technological relics and billions more will flow into the coffers of the contractors.

Along with the V-22 Osprey, the F-22 presents a case study for the Pentagon's procurement pathology: call it the buy-before- you-fly syndrome. "One of the oldest tricks is putting off testing until production has begun," says Danielle Brian, director of the Project on Government Oversight. "As a result, the contractor gets paid twice: once to make a flawed system and once to fix it."

Even by historical standards the escalation in the price-tag for the F-22 has been jaw-dropping. Originally, the Air Force said it was going to purchase 880 planes for around $40 billion. Within a few months, the price doubled to $80 billion. In 1991, the Pentagon's Selected Acquisitions Review looked at the F-22 and decided that fewer planes should be built, scaling the order down to 680 planes for $64.2 billion. Then the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review cut the number of planes even further: 339 aircraft for the same price. The $35 million fighter has now turned into a $190 million plane, four times the cost of an F-15.

But that's not all. When the GAO looked at the mounting cost overruns, they estimated that the $64.2 billion cap would only enable the Pentagon to buy 254 planes, 630 hundred fewer than originally advertised. Rep. John Murtha, the Pennsylvania Republican, is even more circumspect. He predicts that only 150 fighters will be bought. In other words, the planes could cost as much as $350 million apiece.

None of this troubles Lockheed, as long as the entire $64.2 billion is spent. Indeed, the fewer "limited edition" F-22s Lockheed unloads on the Pentagon, the more "copies" it will sell to Israel, Germany, Chile and Indonesia.

"The only way to make the F-22 stealthy is to tear the eyes out of enemy pilots' heads."

But what has all that money bought? Not much when compared to the F-15 and F-16. Even the Pentagon's top testing officer disagrees with the performance status of the F-22. In a December 20, 2000, memo to the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Phillip Coyle, director of Operational Testing and Evaluation for the Pentagon, concluded that the problems with the F-22 were so overwhelming that a decision on putting the plane into production should be delayed indefinitely.

Coyle's memo discloses a litany of problems with the plane, ranging from testing delays, cost overruns, mechanical failures, and serious problems with the avionics system. Coyle warned that the plane couldn't begin operational testing by August 2002 without encountering "unacceptable risks".

The F-22 hasn't proved all that safe to fly either. In one of its first test flights, the F-22 began to wobble uncontrollably as it attempted to land, finally smacking into the runway without landing gear, then skidding for 8,000 feet before it caught fire and partially burned. The third test flight was cancelled because the hydraulic gearing didn't work. In March of last year, the Air Force was forced to suspend test flights for six weeks after a review found problems with the plane's brakes, landing gear, environmental control systems, avionics software, missile launch detector, plus cracks in the cockpit canopy.

The Air Force touts the F-22's supposed stealth capabilities as a point of superiority compared with the aging but durable F-15. But the F-22 hasn't proved to be all that invisible, after all. From one discreet angle, the F-22 slips past radar screens. But from other apertures and latitudes, the plane, in the words of a Senate staffer, "lights up like the Budweiser blimp".

Because it's a fighter intended for aerial combat with other fighter planes, the F-22 will be restricted largely to daytime flights. But the plane is so large—partially because the designers put the missiles inside the fighter in order to lower its profile to enemy radar systems—that it will be easily detectable to the naked eye. It's five times the size of the F-16.

"The only way to make the F-22 stealthy is to tear the eyes out of enemy pilots' heads," says retired Air Force Col. Everest Riccioni. Riccioni is one of the so-called "fighter mafia", along with the late Col. John Boyd and CounterPuncher Pierre Sprey (now the director of Mapleshade Records), who helped to design the F-16, probably the best fighter plane ever produced. The colonel is now one of the F-22's most savage critics.

One intractable problem involves the F-22's complex and unwieldy avionics system, being developed by Boeing. "The avionics for the F-22 was obsolete before the plane even went into production", a Pentagon analyst tells CounterPunch. That's because the computer systems that act as the plane's brain are powered by five-volt silicon chips. These went out of date in 1992 when Intel introduced the 3.3 volt Pentium chip. Now most computers run on the even faster Pentium III, a 1-volt microchip. "Imagine if this plane ever joins the fleet and is running on computer systems that are already 10 years out of date and will be 30 years out of date in the future," a senate staffer said. "It will be like trying to run a spreadsheet with an abacus."

Just to keep the planes maintained the Pentagon will have pay Boeing and Lockheed to keep open old plants to make the archaic parts for the F-22. The Pentagon has already set aside a billion dollars to address the problem of obsolete parts, a problem that will only get more bothersome over the lifetime of the plane. "It'll be like the Pentagon's version of the blacksmith shop at colonial Williamsburg," the senate staffer tells us.

Even in the unlikely event that the F-22's technical and mechanical problems can ulti-

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mately be resolved, the plane still won't meet the Air Force's stated goal of rejuvenating an aging fleet of fighter planes. In fact, it will only exacerbate the problem. Under the F-22 program, the Air Force will find itself with fewer fighter planes with an older average age. This problem didn't just sneak up on the Air Force overnight. It was predicted as far back as 1991 in an independent report by Pentagon analyst Franklin Spinney.

In 1999 Republican congressman Jerry Lewis of California led a successful effort to cut off funding for the opulent fighter jet. The measure passed by an overwhelming margin: 334-45. But Lewis and his colleagues underestimated the Pentagon's power. In a budgetary sleight of hand, the $2.9 billion annual appropriation was simply reallocated by the House/Senate conference committee from procurement accounts to that gold mine of the defense contractors: research and development.

A year later Rep. Peter Defazio, the Democrat from Oregon, went back on the attack. In July 2000, Defazio denounced the F-22's cost as obscene and offered an amendment to the defense appropriations bill which would have knocked down funding for the F-22 by $932 million. This blasphemy roused into action Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham, a California Republican and a fighter pilot in the Vietnam War.

Cunningham rushed to the floor of the House to defend the honor of the Air Force and its contractors. "Our liberal and socialist friends would tell us the Cold War is over and there is no threat," Cunningham blustered. "Our kids are going to die, and its amendments like this that have stopped our military from surviving and put us in a situation where we have got 21 ships along a pier that cannot be deployed because they are down for maintenance." When Defazio denounced Cunningham's tirade as "bizarre", Cunningham screamed that he had visited the Democratic Socialists of America website and discovered a link to the website of the Progressive Caucus, headed by Defazio.

The funding of a big ticket defense system usually hinges on where it's being built. For optimum appropriations, the factories must be located in congressional districts with political clout. The F-22 fits this bill nicely: the engine is being built by Connecticut-based Pratt Whitney, the troubled avionics system is being developed by Boeing in Seattle and the whole bag of tricks is being put together by at Lockheed's plant in Marietta, Georgia. This brings together a powerful cocktail of political powerbrokers, including Democrats Joe Lieberman, Christopher Dodd, Norm Dicks , and Zell Miller.

The plane also had a friend in Bill Clinton. As part of his final budget, Clinton included $2.5 billion for the production and purchase of 10 F-22s in 2001. It was the centerpiece of his $60 billion procurement plan. Lockheed was represented on the Hill by Peter Knight, Al Gore's closest friend and finance chair of the Clinton/Gore 1996 reelection campaign. During Clintontime Lockheed poured more than $2.1 million into DNC accounts.

There was some early hope that Dick Cheney or Donald Rumsfeld might rein in the program, especially if it frees up money for any even bigger spending spree: the new Star Wars scheme. Cheney has a history of bucking Pentagon brass. In 1991, as secretary of defense, hre pulled the plug on the Navy's A-12 attack plane, a $57 billion boondoogle.

But similar boldness with the F-22 seems unlikely. When the F-22 was under attack from a coalition of Republicans and Democrats, including Lewis and Defazio, on the Hill, Cheney and Rumsfeld both came to its rescue, signing a letter touting it as a vital component of the new military. Of course, these days Cheney and Rumsfeld keep talking about the modernization of US military hardware, a code-word for billions in expenditures for R&D programs and new high-tech systems—hence Bush's $310 billion defense budget.

A GAO report in 1994 concluded that it would be cheaper and perhaps even more effective from a military point of view to stick with the F-15. "Instead of confronting thousands of modern Soviet fighters, the US air forces are expected to confront potential adversary air forces that include few fighters that have the capability to the challenge the F-15—the US frontline fighter. Our analysis shows that the F-15 exceeds the most advanced threat system expected to exist. We assumed no improvements will be made to the F-15 but the capability of the 'most advanced threat' assumes certain modifications. Further, our analysis indicates that the current inventory of F-15s can be economically maintained in a structurally sound condition until 2015 or later."

So what's behind the F-22? The project's driven in large measure by what some Pentagon analysts call "the cult of stealth". In the mid-80s the Air Force, struggling to stay relevant, realized that "stealth" was a great marketing tool. The public was fascinated by those black, oddly configured, "invisible" airplanes and so were members of congress. It didn't matter if the stealth bomber was just as visible to most Russian radar system as the B-52 and cost 50 times as much to produce.

"The F-22 is not going to be a fighter-versus-fighter airplane," says Riccioni. "And if you want that capability, you can get it if you don't design for stealth. And if you don't design for stealth, you can make it affordable. And if it's affordable, you can get the numbers you want." Riccioni's right, of course, except for the fact that the Air Force doesn't even need a new fleet of planes because there's no existing fighter threat, hasn't been one since the Korean War, and there's none in the foreseeable future.

Some high-ranking Republicans are beginning to shake their heads at the Pentagon's incessant begging for ever-larger budgets and more expensive weapon systems, like the F-22, even in the face of epidemic cost over-runs. "The Pentagon does not know how much it spends", says Senator Charles Grassley, the Iowa Republican who now heads the Senate Armed Services committee. "It does not know if it gets what it orders in goods and services. And the Pentagon, additionally, does not have a handle on its inventory. If the Pentagon does not know what it owns and spends, then how does the Pentagon know if it needs more money? Ramping up the Pentagon budget when the books are a mess is highly questionable at best. To some it might seem crazy."

"There's no existing fighter threat. Hasn't been one since the Korean War."

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be part of their history and die in it. They offer us this: to live under their foot, obey their will, die in oblivion.

"For the indigenous of Mexico today there are only two options: to resist or to 'modernize'. Those of us who resist 'modernization' live in houses with dirt floors, plank or mud walls, cardboard or thatch roofs. Our table is full of wants. Those of them who 'modernized' live in houses with dirt floors, walls of pieces of nylon, roofs of cardboard or plastic. Their tables are full of wants…. We live equally badly, we indigenous who resist and those who 'modernize'. But some of us are who we are, and the others pretend not to be what they are. Facing these two options, the march for indigenous dignity, the march of the color of the earth tries to construct a new one: the recognition of our difference. This difference organizes itself in autonomy…. Autonomy is integration. What exists now is disintegration."

Addressing Sunday's assembled multitude, Comandante Esther spoke of the poverty, marginalization and oppression that bred their rebellion. "We had to cross hills and mountains to get here because the bad government has not paid attention to our pain… The women die in birth, they see their children die in their arms for lack of medical attention because in the indigenous villages there is no health center and if there is we don't receive genuine treatment as a person.

"We women suffer three times, one for being woman, two for being indigenous, three for being poor. To be able to survive we have to work from childhood. We see ourselves obliged to do it because otherwise we would die of hunger, because for our little production that we sell, they pay us very cheaply, while what we buy is so expensive: medicine, clothing, our tools and other things.

"… Not to die on our knees and begging, we took the decision to organize ourselves in rebellion, to demand what is lacking, our right… We do not come to kneel nor to implore that they pity us. We do not want little stores, beetles, or tv [here there was a mighty applause as this was a reference to Fox's flippant comment during his campaign that all indigenous Mexicans want is to become micro-businessmen with little stores, Volkswagen beetles and tv sets], we want them to recognize our rights as indigenous persons and as women."

After Esther spoke the Comandantes Zebedeo, Tacho, and David. Tacho gave the big picture, reminding us of 500 years of the oppression of indigenous peoples, that the time had come for them to take their place in history. David made the argument in favor of the three preconditions for dialogue, receiving applause when he contrasted the impunity of high-level criminals with the imprisoning of those who committed no crime other than to stand against oblivion.

"Sometimes, like today, with impotent silences."

Marcos spoke last. He opened by noting that the stage where they stood was in front of the old national palace, a government building: "… it is no accident. It is because from the beginning, the government has been behind us. Sometimes with artillery helicopters, sometimes with paramilitaries, sometimes with bombers, sometimes with tanks, sometimes with soldiers, sometimes with police, sometimes with offers for buying and selling consciences, sometimes with offers of surrender, sometimes with lies, sometimes with strident declarations, sometimes with forgetting, sometimes with expectant silences. Sometimes, like today, with impotent silences."

He went on with more or less the usual talk that he has been giving throughout the caravan: that now is the hour of those who are the color of the earth; those who are the color of money tremble in their boots. A theme that recurs throughout the discourse of the comandantes and Marcos is the affirmation of difference, the assertion of dignity, the negation of oblivion: "we are here, and we are indigenous." The giant crowd in the Zocalo is proof that the EZLN has succeeded in drawing the world's attention to Mexico's indigenous people.

If the Congress approves the COCOPA law and the government meets the other preconditions of dialogue, the EZLN may decide to abandon the military path and emerge as a legal social organization.

"A soldier (and I include myself among them) is an absurd and irrational man", Marcos remarked the day before the final rally, " because he has the capacity to resort to violence to convince. That is why we say that soldiers should never govern, and this includes us. Because whoever has had to resort to arms to make his ideas prevail, is very poor in ideas. Armed movements, however revolutionary they may be, are fundamentally arbitrary movements. In every case, what an armed movement must do is plant the problem and move to the side."

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